

TOWN OF ARLINGTON
TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

June 21, 2023

Call to Order

The meeting of the Town Meeting Procedures Committee was called to order by Town Moderator Greg Christiana on Wednesday, March 2, 2023, at 7:08 p.m. in the conference room of the second floor of the Town Hall Annex in Arlington, Massachusetts

Quorum

A quorum was present: Adam Auster, Greg Christiana, Rebecca Gruber, Christopher Moore, and John Worden.

Hybrid Meeting

Mr. Christiana said that remote participation in the meeting was authorized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Public Comment

No Comments

There were no other persons present or remotely present.

Disposition of Minutes

MOTION:

Corrected Minutes

Mr. Worden moved to approve the draft minutes of the June 14, 2023, meeting with the following correction.

On the first page, change the fourth bulleted item under “Town Meeting Debrief” to read “Discussion of low vote count and/or absences at 2023 Town Meeting.”

Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

No Comments

There were no nonmembers present.

Unfinished Business

Town Meeting Debrief

Mr. Christiana noted that the Committee had not completed its discussion of issues that he had identified based on correspondence with Town Meeting members and his own experience.

He shared a list of issues with the Committee. A copy of this list, entitled “Ideas for Town Meeting Policies, Guidelines, and Preparations” is appended to these minutes.

Mr. Christiana said this list was the “procedures” section from a longer list of issues.

*Points of Order
After Debate Ends*

Before resuming the discussion based on that list, however, he introduced the problems that can arise when points of order are made after the question is called, originally suggested in correspondence from Mr. Moore.

When Allowed

Mr. Christiana suggested that there were no points of order that could be in order after debate is ended by a two-thirds vote that would not also be in order at other times.

*Problems Related
to Point of Order*

Discussion included questions of whether Town Meeting is terminating debate too soon, that some points at the 2023 Town Meeting were not in order, that some were legitimate but unanswerable.

Committee members also discussed the requirement imposed by the vote to end debate, even if Town Meeting lacks all the information it might need, and whether and how to share opinions from Town Counsel.

Reconsideration

Mr. Worden noted that in the event of a significant problem that emerges after the question is called, Town Meeting could reconsider the motion. That would reopen it for debate and further action, he said.

*Purpose of
Points of Order*

Mr. Christiana agreed that points of order are not for clarification.

*Recommended
Motions*

Discussion resumed on the question of what is before Town Meeting as a result of the vote, generally considered under Article 3 at the opening of Town Meeting, to place recommended actions of boards and committees before Town Meetings without further motions, and how to handle subsequent changes to those recommendations.

Several members expressed support for the idea that the vote of Town Meeting to consider the recommended actions was a vote to do so for those recommendations as provided to Town Meeting at the time of the Article 3 vote.

If so, changes to those recommendations would need to be made in the form of amendments, and late recommendations would have to be introduced in the usual way.

2023 Town Meeting

In a discussion of this year's Annual Town Meeting generally, different members praised the quality of debate generally, and said that meeting in person conferred many benefits for the functioning of Town Meeting.

Committee members also suggested that the pace of decision making may have been too rapid for some members.

Other issues related to the structure of debate and the inability, under the so-called 48-hour rule, to propose amendments to motions made at the last minute, unless Town Meeting postponed consideration to allow for such amendments.

Deadlines under the 48-Hour Rule

Mr. Christiana told the Committee that the Town Clerk had proposed to him a schedule of deadlines for amendments of 6 p.m. on Thursday for consideration the following Monday, and 3 p.m. on Monday for consideration the following Wednesday,

He said the Town staff needed to be able to process and disseminate proposed amendments via email and the annotated warrant, and that Town Hall was open late on Thursday nights but closed midday on Friday.

Discussion included the need for members to receive proposed amendments in advance and the role that the Moderator has played in reviewing amendments, sometimes through several iterations when time allows.

*Review of
Proposed
Amendments*

Trade-Offs

*Schedule for
Submission and
Review*

Mr. Christiana said his review has considered both scope and how one amendment might make consideration of another amendment impossible depending on the wording and the order considered.

He said it is better for Town Meeting that he be able to work with proponents, but that doing so requires time.

In discussion, members noted the trade-offs between time to perfect proposals, need to provide notice to members, and potential burden of lengthy time requirements on the ability of Town Meeting members to propose amendments.

Discussion tried to tease out ways to shorten the deadline for submitting amendments, taking into account the needs for review and notification of Town Meeting members.

Members also noted the possibility of tabling, postponing, or committing the main motion in especially complex situations.

Mr. Christiana said that a policy of processing and sharing motions in the order received might prove an incentive for Town Meeting members to submit amendments in advance of any deadlines.

Unfinished Business

*Next Meeting:
July 19, 2023*

MOTION:
Adjournment

The Committee agreed that its next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 19, at 7 p.m., at a place to be confirmed later.

Adopted by general consent.

Mr. Auster moved that the meeting adjourn.

Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

The motion passed by general consent.

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Adam Auster

Adjournment

Documents attached to these minutes [omitted from draft]:

1. Notice of meeting
2. “Ideas for Town Meeting Policies, Guidelines, and Preparations”